

Enforcement and Compliance Track

The Sector Approach Workshop

Charles River Initiative

THE PROBLEM:

The Charles River is one of the best-known, most widely-used urban rivers in the world. The river is lined with parkland and boathouses, and until the 1950s, was home to the most popular swimming beaches in greater Boston.

By the mid-1990s, however, the Charles was grossly polluted, meeting swimming standards less than one day in five. Although the river is heavily used by rowers and sailors, it met boating standards only 39% of the time. In 1995, EPA set a clear goal: to make the Charles fishable and swimmable by Earth Day, 2005.

THE SOLUTION:

The EPA approach embodies three core principles:

1) **Enforcement plays a key role.** Some of the key pollution sources in the Charles—sewer overflows and illicit sewer connections to storm drains—can be remedied through an aggressive enforcement approach. A strong enforcement posture helps to focus public attention on problems in the river, and provides an incentive for municipalities and other pollution sources to cooperate with EPA.

2) **Strategic partnerships are critical.** Some pollution sources in the Charles cannot be effectively addressed by enforcement—either they are not regulated, or the regulatory scheme cannot produce the desired environmental result. These sources *can* be addressed by building strategic partnerships with those who do have tools to address the problems (e.g. cooperative efforts to implement storm water controls where there isn't a good regulatory hook). Key partners so far include environmental groups, municipalities, universities, and major landowners along the Charles.

Public support for the project, and EPA recognition of those contributing to the cleanup, provides a strong incentive for entry into such partnerships.

3) **Success is measured by environmental results.** The project has a clear environmental goal, and progress is continually tracked. Water quality is publicized through a system of color-coded flags (updated daily in the summer); a monthly letter report; and an annual report card on Earth Day. Tracking trends in the data allows EPA to assess whether we are on course to meet the 2005 goal, and make corrections if necessary.

Letting the data drive the project changes the way decisions are made. Enforcement actions are selected to address particular environmental problems. Partnerships are not made for their own sake, but in order to produce a tangible environmental result. Data allows the public to judge whether the project is producing meaningful results and prevents the agencies from hiding behind process: people will not be satisfied by partnerships, task force meetings, or traditional A-bean@ measures if the environmental indicators do not improve.

THE RESULTS:

The chart at right illustrates the result of the initiative so far. Swimming standards were met 19% of the time in 1995 and 65% of the time in 2000. Boating standards were met 39% of the time in 1995 and 94% of the time in 2000. (These figures are corrected for rainfall conditions, so that an unusually wet or dry year would not skew the data.)

The improvements so far largely reflect removal of one million gallons per day of illicit sewer discharges through storm drains; reductions in sewer overflows; and initial work on storm water management.

CONTACTS:

Information about the Clean Charles 2005 Initiative is on the EPA-New England website: www.epa.gov/region01/charles/index.html. A multimedia CD-ROM describing the initiative is available on

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